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Conference Abstract

The Biodiversity Informatics Training Curriculum (BITC): Versions 1 and 2

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Abstract

Beginning in 2012, the JRS Biodiversity Foundation funded the University of Kansas to carry out a series of courses covering the breadth of the field of biodiversity informatics in cities across Africa. The Biodiversity Informatics Training Curriculum (BITC) was created from these events that used in-person courses taught by world experts in biodiversity informatics fields. The courses reached 120+ students and young professionals from 23 countries across Africa, and the digital videos of the courses reached thousands of viewers and users worldwide. BITC1 concluded in 2015 and a biodiversity informatics "curriculum" was published in the form of a compendium of BITC course materials (Peterson and Ingenloff 2016)—this curriculum has now been used as the basis for multiple programs of study around the world. BITC2 is now funded, again thanks to the JRS Biodiversity Foundation—this second version involves longer, more thematically oriented courses to be held in three east and southern African countries. The first will be held in Rwanda, in September 2019, and will focus on "Measuring Essential Biodiversity Variables and Ecosystem Services." BITC2 courses will begin with an open symposium, and then will proceed with intensive, hands-on, goal-oriented workshops with a small number of participants.

The overall objective of the BITC is a community-oriented and community-run set of training events that can provide avenues to advanced study, international collaboration,

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and region-wide integration of efforts in biodiversity informatics. BITC2 has four main goals:

1. implement new training dimensions in both an open symposium forum and an intensive, goal-and-product-focused approach that we tested in the later courses of BITC1;
2. expand access to learning resources via subtitling and translation;
3. build collaborative BITC communities via social media platforms; and
4. build within-Africa capacity in biodiversity informatics via high-level involvement of a number of African scientists and educators.

These goals will be achieved via three, once-yearly symposium/course combination events which will be organized and implemented by combined leadership teams from the UK, USA, and African countries, and are intended to provide a combined total of 30-33 days of training to 36-42 trainees. Here we present the format of the BITC1 and BITC2 courses, and the positive and negative outcomes that have resulted, with an eye to optimal design of future such initiatives.

Keywords

JRS Biodiversity Foundation, training, Africa, language localization, social media, capacity building

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